DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 225 382 FL 013 431

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TITLE Communicative Methods for Use of Authentic Cultural Materials.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; Cultural Awareness; German; Higher Education; *Instructional Materials; Learning Activities; Native Speakers; Reading Comprehension; *Realia; *Second Language Instruction; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

The advantages of using authentic cultural materials in teaching second languages and the development of productive activities to accompany these materials are described. Based on the notion that comprehension precedes production, authentic texts provide the second language learner with a foundation of concepts and vocabulary from which communication of actual ideas can arise. The use of materials produced by native speakers in meaningful contexts provides students with direct access to the appropriate culture. In using authentic materials, students must learn to use the portions of the text that they do understand as keys to understanding the unknown portions. Exercises should be directed at expanding from the known to the unknown. Early exercises may involve identifying the kind of text, speculating about where the text can be found, and identifying times and places mentioned in the text. The text should then be divided into manageable sections so that students can learn to make informed decisions about which items in the text should be pursued for greater comprehension. Examples of exercises based on an authentic German text are presented. Finally, understanding of authentic cultural materials will direct students' attention away from the classroom and toward the new culture. (RW)

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Communicative Methods for Use of Authentic Cultural Materials

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There has been a great deal of recent activity concerning authentic cultural materials, particularly in German. The Goethe Institut has sponsored at least two seminars a year over the last several years for production and "Didaktisierung" of authentic cultural units. Inter Nationes makes a variety of authentic materials available to German teachers. In 1982 the National Endowment for the Humanities sponsored a four week summer institute at Austin College at which some 60 high school German, French and Spanish teachers prepared units of authentic cultural materials for their classes. While the programs dealing with authentic materials represent a variety of interests, they share at least two aims: to get more authentic materials into the foreign language classroom and to have students work with these materials in productive ways. The purpose of this paper is to explain the advantages of working with authentic materials and to describe guidelines for devising productive activities

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to be carried out with authentic materials.

The model for using authentic materials being followed here is designed to develop communicative competence in second language learners. It is based on the notion that comprehension precedes production. Authentic texts are used to provide the learner with a foundation of concepts and vocabulary from which production can develop. It is a reaction against putting students into situations where their required production is virtually devoid of content, i.e. verb conjugation drills. Good authentic materials are instead rich in content and full of implications. Students are then asked to uncover this wealth and analyze the implications. Their production thus becomes communication of ideas rather than simply manipulation of forms.

The term authentic materials will be used here to refer to examples of language produced by native or near-native speakers in contexts which are meaningful to them. The term does not refer to materials expressly produced for language learners. Such synthetic materials are often designed to be cultural, but are in fact not genuine cultural artifacts.

The most significant advantage of using authentic materials in the second language class is that they provide students with direct and immediate access to the appropriate culture. Students no longer have to rely on their teacher or their textbook to receive information about the culture. Instead they learn to deal with sources they would encounter were they to visit the culture themselves. Students whose only source of insight is the graded readings in their text and their teacher's reminiscences will be ill prepared to deal with the wealth and variety of available sources in the new culture. If students have made sense of interviews, newspaper articles, statistics, political cartoons and television programs in class, then they will be in a much better position to deal successfully with the culture in which the language is spoken. Since authentic materials are the raw data of a culture, students' ability to understand a culture will depend on their ability to interpret that data. Rather than present students with a series of simplified conclusions about a culture, which may or may not be accurate, why not help them to develop strategies for arriving at their own conclusions based on careful analysis of

available data?

Naturally students will not be able to examine all the authentic material produced in a given culture. The quantity of available material is overwhelming. Instead students must learn to make informed decisions about which materials to spend time with and which to ignore. This ability can be developed by giving students practice in identifying which portions of a text are important. A typical student response to a new text is to pull out the dictionary and look up every word the student does not "know." This response is based upon the false belief that a reader must "know" every lexical item in order to make sense of a text. The relevant question for the langauge learner should not be whether or not the text can be understood without looking up any words, but which elements of the text are necessary to convey the message. Students can be taught to employ explicit strategies for identifying and figuring out the meaning of key elements in individual texts. These strategies may then also be applied successfully to all the available authentic materials, enabling students to determine which texts contain information related to the topic under investigation.

Having mastered the necessary techniques, students' work with authentic texts becomes more productive and more rewarding. Instead of concentrating on what they do not "know," students spend their time using what they do understand in a text to make sense of what is unclear. If students, not the teacher, have identified a text or a portion of a text as relevant and important, then they have an added incentive to make sense of it. Production becomes the most reasonable way of demonstrating comprehension. If materials are arranged around a central theme, necessary vocabulary accumulates and production can become increasingly sophisticated.

It is by now obvious that for the use of authentic materials to succeed in providing students with all these advantages, materials must be dealt with in new ways. The traditional approach to a text, namely taking it apart by asking detailed content questions, will not work when applied to authentic materials. The first reason the traditional approach will not work is that it sets as its goal 100% comprehension of the text. Questions are designed to draw attention to elements of a text which students have not understood.

A more appropriate exercise would be to have students identify

characteristics of the text they have understood. The key is to begin with the global and work to the specific. Establish islands of comprehension in the new text on which students can expand and from which they can venture into unknown waters, namely the rest of the text, with increasing security.

Orientational exercises may at first seem trivial, but they encourage students to catalogue the information they have received from the text. Examples of such exercises include:

identifying the kind of text (i.e. song, advertisement, poem, etc.)

speculating about where such a text could be found;

identifying times and places mentioned in the text.

Answers to any questions posed at this stage should be treated as hypotheses, the correctness of which will be tested against the text. Whenever students suggest an hypothesis about a new text, they should be asked to identify elements of the text which lead them to this hypothesis. If a text has been identified as an advertisement, for example, students can cite layout, frequency of pictures and prominence of a product name as supporting evidence for this hypothesis.

Popular songs provide a good example of how critical orientation exercises can be in helping students approach authentic texts. A typical student response upon first hearing a popular song in a foreign language is, "I didn't understand a word!" Yet even if this were the case, students would still be able to identify characteristics of the song: How many singers? Were the singers male or female? How would you characterize the music? (i.e. old fashioned, modern, punk, etc.) How would you characterize the tone of the song? (i.e. serious, funny, happy, sad, etc.) Having established a minimal foundation of information, students can now approach the text of the song.

The next step is to divide the text into manageable sections. With printed materials, these divisions are usually dictated by external features of the text like print size, paragraphs, etc. A popular song can be divided (by the students!) according to verses, changes in tempo, etc. Now that the text has been subdivided, students can begin deciphering portions of the text. For expediency it is often a good idea to divide a class into small groups, each of which is responsible for a portion of the text. Instead of

simply flipping through a dictionary, students can be asked to complete a variety of exercises designed to lead them to improved comprehension of the text without resorting to their native language.

The following examples illustrate ways in which exercises can lead students to improved comprehension.[1]

Text

Name: Heiko Kreuz

Alter: 15 Jahre

Ich möchte bei einer grossen Papierfirma Grosshandelskaufmann lernen. Papier braucht man immer. Ausserdem ist diese Firma am Ort. Oder ich lerne Elektriker und mache dann ein eigenes Geschäft auf.

Name: Kirsten Mader

Alter: 15 Jahre

Ich will Stewardess werden. Bei diesem Beruf kommt man viel mit anderen Leuten zusammen. Man hat viel Abwechslung und macht viele Reisen. Also, man kommt viel in der Welt rum. Das macht mir bestimmt Spass.

Übung 1

Wer sagt was? Verbinden Sie mit einem Strich jeden Namen mit einem passenden Satz.

Heiko	Ich arbeite gern mit Kindern.
	Ich reise sehr gern.
Kirsten	Ich arbeite gern mit etwas, was man immer braucht.

Übung 2

Finden Sie einen Satz in den Texten, der das Gleiche sagt.

1. Kirsten sagt nicht:"Man reist viel durch die Welt,"
   sondern _____ .
2. Heiko sagt nicht: "Diese Firma ist hier in der Stadt,"
   sondern _____.

Übung 3

Welcher Beruf passt zu welchem Satz?

1.	___ Manager	a.	arbeitet in einer Schule
2.	___ Stewardess	b.	ein Chef in einer Firma
3.	___ Lehrer	c.	serviert das Essen im Flugzeug

These exercises are all designed to take advantage of students' ability to recognize portions of the original text which correspond to paraphrases. The paraphrases are designed to be similar enough to ensure that students can recognize their referents, yet different enough for students to have a second chance at comprehension when they encounter the same idea formulated slightly differently. They encourage students to identify significant aspects of a text. Often the paraphrase will enable students to understand a word or phrase without reaching for the dictionary. The entire operation, including small group work, can be carried out in German.

Once students have worked with a text in this way, they will be much better able to make informed decisions about which items in the text are worth pursuing and which can be skipped. If students decide that certain words or phrases are imperative for their comprehension of the text, then they can seek clarification from a native informant, the teacher or a dictionary.

The greatest advantage of authentic cultural materials comes after students have achieved the desired level of comprehension for a given text. It is now that students can learn to investigate

a new culture. Once they have achieved sufficient comprehension, their interpretation of the text should begin. Each text can now be treated as a cultural document. Students should be urged to make conclusions about the culture based on the texts they have handled. In the example cited above, students could be asked to identify the degree to which professions being considered by Kirsten and Heiko were related to traditional notions of occupations that are "appropriate" for males and females. Statistics could be investigated which identify occupations most popular with young males and females in the culture. A final production exercise could be to draw up similar statistics for the German class and compare the degree to which sex roles determine occupational choice here and in the new culture.

The conclusions of such an investigation would of course be highly subjective. Certainly it is inappropriate to conclude that today's Germans choose occupations according to traditional views of sex roles based solely on the future plans of two fifteen year olds. Yet students who visit a new culture will arrive at conclusions about the culture based on their analysis of the data they receive,

not on the alleged objectivity of that data. Why not then encourage our students to become expert analysts of the data they receive? This will not only enable them to reach their own conclusions about the culture, they will also begin to do so by examining authentic artifacts of the culture.

Their work in the classroom will no longer make them increasingly dependent on the teacher and the text. Instead they will be directed away from the classroom. They will begin to develop strategies for dealing successfully with the new culture on its own terms. While doing so they will be provided with a wealth of opportunities for using the language in contexts which are both interesting and meaningful. By encouraging our students to use all their powers of reason and intuition, to draw on all their previous learning, rather than to check it at our classroom door, we not only better prepare them for successful interaction with a new culture, we also make our classes more interesting for them and for us.

Notes

1. These examples are taken from the unit "Wunsch und Wirklichkeit: der Weg ins Berufsleben" produced by Barbara Kienbaum (Purdue University Calumet), David Stout (Austin College) and Sam Welty (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater). It is available upon request from Dieter Arnsdorf, Goethe House, New York, as are the other units produced in the Goethe Institut materials seminar, 1982.